



The Brief and Unofficial Groundwork USA Guide to Successful Video Community Meetings

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Social distancing is putting a cramp in what Groundwork Trusts do best- gathering people in their living rooms, parks, schools, and senior centers to engage in meaningful, equitable community engagement, and shared leadership and decision making. While we can't reach all of our residents and stakeholders by videochat, some of our work **has** to continue via Zoom and other digital platforms. (See <https://tinyurl.com/GWUSA-RemoteGuide> for our Guide to Remote Community Engagement.)

This document is an incomplete guide to holding a great video conference meeting and is generally geared towards conversations with more than 10 participants. I won't cover all of the snazzy features of Zoom or other virtual meeting platforms like GlobalMeet or Google Hangouts, but instead will give you a basic primer on how to make the video chat meetings you *do* have engaging, fun, and as accessible as possible.

I haven't captured everything here, so if you have ideas that I missed, please, please share the wealth of your experience! Email Cate@GroundworkUSA.org and I'll be sure to get your ideas into this document.

I'll pop an outline below so you can look for the section that most speaks to your needs and then jump in. I hope this is helpful- feel free to share with your staff and others outside our network.

Topics Covered in This Document

1. Who should do what? What staff roles are key to a good meeting?
2. How do I get people to participate? How do I keep people from talking at once?
3. I've heard tales of naked or poorly behaved participants, how do I prevent that?
4. What can I do if my participants aren't tech savvy?
5. What about deaf or hard of hearing participants?
6. How can I include language translation services?
7. Why are people freaking out/angry at me and the platform? Does that mean I should give up on conducting community meetings via video conference?

1. Who Does What?

Just like an in-person meeting that has facilitators, sign-in folks, and translators (more on that later) your online meeting should have a few key roles to help things run smoothly. Assign volunteers or members of your staff to the following four roles:

Tech Guru: This person is on-call to deal with any tech issues, lets people into the meeting from the waiting room and can one-on-one chat with folks who are having trouble getting their tech up and running. Make sure to enable “host” privileges for this person.

Emcee: This person sets the agenda, and facilitates the conversation, keeps the group on track.

Chat Box Maven: This person keeps an eye on the chat box ([both within the platform and on the comments section of Facebook if you're streaming your conference live](#)) and brings relevant comments and questions to the attention of the **Emcee** and **Tech Guru**.

Hype Person: This person is in charge of paying attention to the energy of the room and keeping the conversation encouraging and productive. It's tough for participants to stare at a screen for a long time, so shouting-out good ideas and creating a positive vibe will keep the energy up and the work moving forward.

2. How do I get folks to participate? How do I keep everyone from talking at once? Or one person from monopolizing the conversation?

1. An old adage goes that if you speak on the first day of class, you're more likely to feel comfortable speaking up during the rest of the semester. A similar philosophy applies to video conference calls. Without the benefit of seeing other people's body language, it can be hard to jump into a conversation. **Asking people a quick question at the beginning of the conference is a great way to get them comfortable with speaking up and force them to familiarize themselves with how to mute and unmute their line.** (Pro tip: If you're on Zoom, you can briefly unmute by holding down the spacebar.) Make sure to set aside time for this- it's worth it, I promise! Introductions aren't super practical for groups larger than 25, but definitely familiarize participants with mute/unmute and the chatbox/hand-raise feature.

2. Make sure to take time to train participants on how to use the chatbox and hand-raise features. Let them know how to publicly comment and how to privately comment. Throwing a softball question (e.g. “What did you do this weekend?” “What did you eat for breakfast this morning?”) allows people to practice in a low-stakes way.
3. In large groups (>20 participants) use the hand raise, reaction, and polling functions to keep an organized flow and conversation. You might also choose to have participants answer reflections questions in a public google doc. With fancier video conferencing accounts, you can have your group split into small groups- if you do so, make sure that all small groups have a facilitator and a clear task to keep everyone on track.
4. Online polling through services like Zoom and [Poll Everywhere](#) allow you to collect live feedback via text and present the answers in real time.
5. When participants are supposed to introduce themselves/share information, how do you make that process orderly and keep folks from talking over one another?

You have a few options here:

- a. The host can call out names or phone numbers and keep track of who has spoken (e.g. “Thanks for sharing, Rahmel. Rashida, can I ask you to introduce yourself next?”)
- b. In smaller groups, go by name/region/office from A-Z (Just make sure in your invite/pre-meeting email you list the expected groups in order so no one has to do some funky, on the fly alphabetizing).

4. I’ve heard tales of naked or poorly behaved participants, how do I prevent that?

1. **Let people know that they are visible and if you are recording.** It might seem counterintuitive that if someone clicked the dialog box agreeing to let the program access their camera that they wouldn’t know that they’re visible, but here we are. Your colleagues have seen some wild things- people changing their clothes, going to the bathroom, and lounging in bed are some of the tamer activities accidentally witnessed by a crowd. **Protect your guests, remind them that they’re visible.**

2. If folks get unruly or super rude, you have a few courses of action:
 - a. Mute them.
 - b. Have the **Hype Person** check in with them via private chat to see if they can get to the root of the problem.
 - c. If, after a conversation and request to tone down the behavior, the participant is still posing challenges, the **Tech Guru** can remove the person from the video call. Zoom has a [waiting room](#) feature, which allows the **Tech Guru** to control if and when a participant joins/rejoins the meeting. I encourage you to use the waiting room feature if your organization's video conferencing platform has one.

5. What if my stakeholders aren't so tech savvy?

For some, videoconferencing is a straightforward affair, but for others, it can be tough to add another digital tool to their lives. When possible, include a call-in number alongside the conference link so that folks can join by phone. This expands the meeting to those without a smart phone/computer/internet connection.

[Connecting your Zoom meeting/presentation to Facebook Live](#) can be an easy way to lower the bar to entry for your meetings. Participants can just go to your Facebook page on their phones or computers and can comment on the post (make sure your **Chatbox Maven** is keeping a close eye on the comments section.)

6. How do I make my meeting accessible to those who are deaf or hard of hearing?

Google Hangouts has a [pretty decent automatic transcription/closed captioning](#) feature, and Zoom allows you to [assign transcription duties to a participant](#) (or you can [integrate a third-party closed captioning service](#)).

7. What about language translation services?

In an in-person community meeting you are able to have a few languages going, but is there a streamlined way to have translation services running during your meeting? Turns out, the answer is yes! If you'd like to have a separate language stream running simultaneously, [Zoom allows you to add your interpreter as an alternate host](#).

8. Why are people freaking out/angry? Does that mean I should give up on video conferencing?

I'm going to channel the great Oprah Winfrey here and encourage you to **come from a place of love**. (My other favorite Oprah quote for situations like this is **"Don't personalize, don't personalize, don't personalize!"**)

People are stressed and overwhelmed and expressing their feelings in so many different ways.

One of those ways might be extra frustration with learning or participating in a new technology. Be clear, patient, loving, and generous (to others and to yourself). Even when things go back to "normal," it's likely that increased digital engagement is here to stay, at least for a little while. There's going to be a learning curve for you and for your community- lean into it, help others, and good luck!

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About Groundwork USA

Groundwork USA is a national non-profit organization working at the intersection of the environment, equity, and civic engagement to transform the natural and built environment of low-resource communities. Together with our network of 21 Groundwork Trusts, we're working to bring about the sustained regeneration, improvement, and management of the physical environment by developing community-based partnerships that empower people, businesses, and organizations to promote environmental, economic, and social well-being.

For more information visit www.groundworkusa.org.